

A Report of the
Department of Social Services
Commonwealth of Virginia

**ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN
RESEARCH
State Fiscal Year 2013**

to the Governor and the
General Assembly of Virginia

October 2013

Preface

Section 63.2-218 of the Code of Virginia (Code) requires the State Board of Social Services to adopt regulations regarding human research. The statute further requires the human research committee, referred to as the Institutional Review Board (IRB), to provide an annual report to the Governor and General Assembly on the human research projects reviewed and approved during the operating year:

The Board shall adopt regulations to effectuate the provisions of Chapter 5.1 (§ 32.1-162.16 et seq.) of Title 32.1 for human research, as defined in § 32.1-162.16, to be conducted or authorized by the Department, any agency or facility licensed by the Department, or any local department. The regulations shall require the human research committee to submit to the Governor, the General Assembly, and the Commissioner at least annually a report on the human research projects reviewed and approved by the committee and shall require the committee to report any significant deviations from the proposals as approved.

This report on human research projects reviewed and approved by the IRB during State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2013 is in response to the mandate in § 63.2-218.

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Executive Summary

In SFY 2013, the Department of Social Services' (DSS) human research committee, referred to as the Institutional Review Board (IRB), reviewed six (6) proposed research projects. Three studies qualified for expedited review, one study for full-board review, and two studies qualified as exempt from review. In addition, two ongoing studies were each approved for one-year continuations.

Research involving DSS clients generally involves no risk of physical harm because it is not clinical research but observational studies of human behavior. The potential risk for DSS studies most often involves issues of client privacy and, to a lesser extent, psychological harm (for example, from surveys that include sensitive questions). The IRB has a responsibility to protect client privacy and, more generally, to minimize the risks of research activities to DSS clients.

Department of Social Services

Annual Report on Human Research, SFY 2013

Report Mandate

The purpose of this report is to provide the Governor and the General Assembly with a summary of the activities of the DSS IRB for SFY 2013 (July 1, 2012 through June 30, 2013). The IRB is charged with reviewing, approving, and monitoring research conducted or authorized by DSS, local departments of social services, DSS contractors, and DSS-licensed facilities.

Section 63.2-218 of the code of Virginia requires the IRB to “submit to the Governor, the General Assembly, and the Commissioner at least annually a report on the human research projects reviewed and approved by the committee and shall require the committee to report any significant deviations from the proposals as approved.” Appendix A provides the full text of Section 63.2-218.

Introduction

Research involving DSS clients is not biomedical in nature. Typically, DSS clients participate in social or behavioral studies and in evaluations. Unlike medical studies, physical risk from this type of research is rare. Most often, the potential risk in DSS-related studies involves privacy issues. DSS-related research projects may also include survey questions concerning issues that are psychologically or sociologically sensitive.

The IRB reviews such research in advance to ensure, first, that the rights of clients are protected and, second, that the proposed research maintains the privacy and welfare of the participants.

Human Research Activities for SFY 2013

The DSS Division of Research and Planning is responsible for administering the IRB and ensuring compliance with federal and state regulations regarding human subject research. Gail Jennings, Ph.D., a research associate senior in Research and Planning, has been serving as Coordinator for the DSS IRB since January 2012. Upon appointment by the DSS Commissioner in June 2012,¹ Dr. Jennings also assumed the role of IRB Chair, effective July 1, 2012. Dr. Erik Beecroft, DSS Director of Research and Planning and former IRB Chair, continued to play an active role in the DSS IRB until he left the agency in March 2013. (The Research and Planning Director position is currently vacant and under recruitment.)

Major activities in support of the IRB for SFY 2013 included:

¹ Martin Brown was the DSS Commissioner until January 2013 when he accepted a new appointment from the Governor. Margaret R. Schultze, Deputy Commissioner for Operations, was appointed Acting Commissioner in January 2013.

- Providing input and feedback for proposed research and evaluation studies and informing involved Principal Investigators (PI) and DSS division directors about relevant IRB regulations and requirements;
- Reviewing research protocols submitted for IRB review and determining whether they met the criteria for IRB approval;
- Reviewing requests from PI to extend approval for studies planned for continuation beyond their initial one-year approval;
- Convening the DSS IRB in-person annually;
- Informing DSS IRB members about procedural changes via conference calls and e-mail correspondence;
- Developing an Access database to improve tracking of IRB reviews of research protocols, modifications, and continuations; and
- Updating the IRB manual and forms posted on the VDSS web site. A revision to the IRB manual was posted on the DSS public website (<http://www.dss.virginia.gov/about/irb.cgi>) in early December 2012.

The State Board of Social Services human research regulation requires that IRB members “ensure the competent, complete, and professional review of human research.” State regulations require that the Board have a minimum of seven members, including two members who represent non-scientific disciplines.

In June 2012, the DSS Commissioner appointed a new board consisting of nine members (including Drs. Beecroft and Jennings) to serve a three-year term (July 1, 2013 - June 30, 2015).² Five IRB members are social services government agency employees (four from the Home Office and one from a local agency). Four members come from DSS partner organizations, including the Virginia Community College System, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Homeward (regional homeless coordinating agency). Several members have prior IRB and research experience. The IRB members fully meet the membership requirements of both state and federal human research regulations. A list of DSS IRB members appointed for the 2013-2015 term is located in Appendix B.

The agency IRB maintains its registration with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). The registration is effective through May 2015. Furthermore, the agency maintains its status as an organization conducting human research (Federal-Wide Assurance) with the OHRP. The agency’s FWA registration expires in June 2017.

Projects Reviewed

There were six projects reviewed in SFY 2013. Three studies qualified for *expedited* review and one study was reviewed by the *full board*. Two studies qualified as *exempt* from review by the DSS IRB.

² Two members (Dr. Beecroft and Jennifer Behrens) left DSS prior to the end of SFY 2013. The IRB continues to maintain the required minimum number of members. The IRB Coordinator/Chair is compiling a list of qualified candidates to have appointed by the Commissioner.

Study # 2013-01H
Principal Investigator: Kwangseon Hwang (Doctoral candidate)
Affiliation: Virginia Tech University, Center for Public Administration and Policy
Title of Study: “Accountability Management at the Street-Level: The impact of formal and informal accountability on the child welfare program performance in Virginia”
Date Approved: March 14, 2013
Review Type: Expedited
Description of Study: This study examines the level of perceived accountability reported by child welfare case workers in local departments of social services and its relationship to employee performance. In the first phase of the study, the PI conducted semi-structured interviews with a small (20-30) sample of Child Protective Services (CPS) case workers and supervisors. The findings from the interview were used to refine a survey tool to be used in a later phase of the study. In the second phase of the study, the PI administered an online survey to all CPS child welfare workers and supervisors in the state. This study was concurrently approved by the Virginia Tech IRB. The DSS IRB separately approved both phases of the study in an **expedited** review after requesting extensive revisions to the interview and survey instruments. At the request of the IRB, the PI worked with the DSS Regional Offices to have the CPS Consultants send the survey to employees on his behalf. This was to ensure that employees’ privacy was protected. The introduction to the survey included stronger language about the voluntariness of participation in the study.

Study # 2013-02M
Principal Investigator: Dayanand Manoli, Ph.D.
Affiliation: U.S. Department of the Treasury (the PI is also faculty at the University of Texas-Austin)
Title of Study: “EITC Outreach to Reduce Filing Burden”
Date Approved: January 28, 2013
Review Type: Full Board
Description of Study: This study proposes to use DSS benefit programs’ client data to pre-populate state and federal income tax returns. The goal is to increase EITC participation among eligible individuals (i.e., TANF, SNAP and Medicaid recipients) in Virginia. The study involved DSS sending client household and earnings data (obtained from the Virginia Employment Commission) to the Treasury Department to be linked to income tax return data. The study was conducted in two phases. In Phase 1 (pre-testing), the DSS clients’ household information was compared to information reported on the individual’s 2012 tax return. In Phase 2 (Experimental Analysis), 2013 tax forms will be pre-populated with administrative data and mailed to a sample of individuals who did not previously claim EITC. The study includes a comparison group who do not receive pre-populated tax forms. Since this study involves use of personal identifiers (name, SSN) for the data linkages, the IRB conducted a **full board** review. The IRB required that the PI share the results of Phase 1 of the study and notify participants in the experimental group that they will receive tax forms with pre-populated data, which they could later amend.

The study was undergoing internal review by the Treasury Department and awaiting results from Phase 1 before approving the entire study.

Study # 2013-02M
Principal Investigator: Gregory Mills, Ph.D.
Affiliation: The Urban Institute
Title of Study: “Understanding the Rates, Causes, and Costs of Churning in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program”
Date Approved: January 31, 2013
Review Type: Expedited
Description of Study: This study is part of a multi-state research project, funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) branch. The purpose of this study is to combine quantitative and qualitative research to advance FNS’ understanding of the patterns, causes, and costs of client "churning" (i.e., clients reentering the program after four months or less off the program) in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and to investigate policies and practices that might reduce churning and mitigate its costs. The Urban Institute project team conducted site visits to each state and performed qualitative (in-person and focus group) interviews with Benefit Programs local agency staff, community-based organizations, and SNAP clients to assess the implementation of SNAP policies in the field, potential reasons for churning, and the policies and practices that might reduce churning and mitigate its costs. In addition, the project team worked with VDSS staff to obtain SNAP administrative data for 2010-2012 to estimate rate of churning over time and correlate this with information about earnings and participation in other programs. The study, which was previously approved by the Urban Institute’s IRB, underwent an **expedited** review by the DSS IRB. As conditions for approval, the DSS IRB required that the client recruitment for the focus groups be handled through the DSS state agency and that the administrative client dataset not include personal identifiers.

Study # 2013-04F
Principal Investigator: Sarah Fisher
Affiliation: Albemarle County Department of Social Services
Title of Study: “Albemarle County Department of Social Services’ Adult Protective Services Assessment of Risk Tool (APSART) Validity Study”
Date Approved: April 16, 2013
Review Type: Expedited
Description of Study: This study examines the predictive validity of a new screening tool (APSART) to assess risk factors and case needs for adults referred to Albemarle County’s Adult Protective Services. Albemarle County DSS started using the tool in 2010 as a standard component within APS program operations. Social workers use APSART data to indicate clients’ progress overall and within eight sub-categories that align with state guidelines: physical health, mental health, cognitive functioning, environmental risks, support system, abuse/neglect/-exploitation factors, economic resources, and alleged perpetrator. Analyzing existing client administrative data, the study determined if the assessment tool can predict subsequent maltreatment 45 days

later. Other factors—for example, client characteristics and need and acceptance of services (case disposition)--were examined in the data analysis. The DSS IRB approved this study in an **expedited** review. The PI notified the IRB about the following modifications made to the study since its approval: 1) dropping the request for client name and date of birth, 2) having DSS compute the client’s age as of the report date as a substitute, and 3) requesting information on whether or not the client had previously founded reports of abuse or neglect. The IRB did not regard these changes as posing a greater risk to clients in this study.

The following two studies were deemed **exempt** from review:

- “APS Structured Decision Making Risk Assessment Tool Validation” (PI: Kristen Johnson, National Council on Crime and Delinquency; conducted in cooperation with the Norfolk Department of Human Services). This study was exempt from review because the study involved the study of existing data that are recorded in such a manner that clients cannot be identified.
- “Developmental Screenings for Children Needs Assessment” (PI: Parthy Dinora, Virginia Commonwealth University). This study was exempt from review because the study uses survey procedures to collect information from child care providers that is publicly available as part of a needs assessment.

Continuation Reviews and Modifications

One ongoing study was approved in a Continuation Review.

- “Respite to Enable Permanent Placement for Children with Reactive Attachment” (PI: Mark Kilgus, Ph.D, M.D., Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine) – The study, which was initially approved in November 2011, had not recruited any participants as of November 2012. The PI informed the IRB that it would conduct recruitment and training activities for potential respite families in early 2013.

One study -- “Assessing Lifestyles to Foster Healthy Living and Integrating Healthful Eating and Physical Activity Skills into the Foster Care System: A Delphi Study” (Estabrooks and Parks, Virginia Tech) -- had a minor modification. The local department of social services sponsor had transferred to another local agency.

Significant Changes to Approved Projects

There were none to report.

IRB Meetings

The IRB Chair/Coordinator convened the newly appointed Board for its first meeting on October 9, 2012. Eight of nine members attended. The goal of the meeting was to provide an orientation to IRB procedures and practices. Following the meeting, the IRB Chair/Coordinator informed members of training opportunities (e.g., webinars, training videos) accessible through the OHRP website.

Results of Completed Research

Chapter 413 of the 2007 Acts of Assembly amended and reenacted § 32.1-162.19, relating to human research review committees, by adding a new sub-section E that states:

Each human research review committee of a state institution or agency shall ensure that an overview of approved human research projects and the results of such projects are made public on the institution's or agency's website unless otherwise exempt from disclosure under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (i.e., § 2.2-3700 et seq.).

In compliance with this legislative mandate, the results of all completed IRB-approved research studies are listed on the IRB Internet web site by year of approval, under the heading "Results of Approved Projects." The address of the IRB Internet web site is: <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/about/irb.cgi>. Results from studies initiated in SFY 2005 through SFY 2012 are available.

The following studies were completed in SFY 2013:

- "Assessing Lifestyles to Foster Healthy Living and Integrating Healthful Eating and Physical Activity Skills into the Foster Care System: A Delphi Study" (Co-PIs: Paul Estabrooks, Ph.D, Virginia Tech University; and Serena Parks, doctoral candidate), which was approved by the DSS IRB in June 2011. The study data collection was completed in June 2012. Ms. Parks defended her dissertation in September 2012.
- "Risky Relationships and Teen Dating Violence Among High-Risk Adolescents" (PI: N. Dickon Reppucci, Ph.D, University of Virginia Department of Psychology), which was approved by the IRB in March 2010. The study was approved for two annual continuations. Preliminary study results were sent to the IRB in June 2012.

A summary of findings for these two studies are in Appendix C.

Appendix A: Code of Virginia Mandate

§ 63.2-218. Board to adopt regulations regarding human research.

The Board shall adopt regulations to effectuate the provisions of Chapter 5.1 (§ 32.1-162.16 et seq.) of Title 32.1 for human research, as defined in § 32.1-162.16, to be conducted or authorized by the Department, any agency or facility licensed by the Department, or any local department. The regulations shall require the human research committee to submit to the Governor, the General Assembly, and the Commissioner at least annually a report on the human research projects reviewed and approved by the committee and shall require the committee to report any significant deviations from the proposals as approved.

(1992, c. 603, § 63.1-25.01; 2002, c. 747.)

Appendix B: DSS IRB Membership (2013-2015)

DSS Institutional Review Board, 2013-2015		
Name	Qualification for Service	Institutional Affiliation
Erik Beecroft (Co-Chair)	Ph.D., Economics Director of Research & Planning	Virginia Department of Social Services, Office of Organizational Development, Research and Planning
Gail Jennings (Co-Chair & Coordinator)	Ph.D., Psychology Senior Research Associate	Virginia Department of Social Services, Office of Organizational Development, Research and Planning
Mary Disse	B.A., Psychology Business Analyst Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Information Systems	Virginia Department of Social Services, Division of Information Systems
Jennifer Behrens	M.S.W.; Ph.D. candidate (Public Policy and Administration) Program Manager, Outcome- Based Reporting and Analysis Unit (OBRA)	Virginia Department of Social Services Division of Family Services
Erika Jones-Haskins	M.S.W. Director of Program Initiatives	Homeward, Program Initiatives
Susan K. Spain	M.S. Senior Research Assistant	Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Family Medicine
Greg Stolcis	Ph.D., Public Policy and Administration Adjunct Faculty (VCU)	Virginia Commonwealth University, Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs
Tamara Temoney	Ph.D., Public Policy and Administration Assistant Agency Director	Hanover County Department of Social Services
Najmah Thomas	Ph.D., Public Policy and Administration Policy Planning Specialist	Virginia Community College System

Appendix C: Summary of Study Findings

Principal Investigator: Serena L. Parks (Ph.D. Candidate); Co-Investigator: Paul Estabrooks, PhD

Institutional Affiliation: Virginia Tech University (Human Nutrition, Foods and Exercise)

Study Title: Fostering Healthy Lifestyles: Assessing the Need and Potential Intervention Strategies for Foster Children

Term of IRB Approval: June 10, 2011 – June 10, 2012

Study Completed: June 2012 (Dissertation defended in September 2012)

Summary or Abstract:

According to recent estimates, approximately 423,773 children in the United States are in foster care (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). While research has documented that childhood obesity is high in foster children, the relationship between nutrition, physical activity, weight status of foster children and the foster home environment is unclear. Furthermore, there is a gap in the literature on the capacity of the child welfare system to address obesity among this population nor practical intervention strategies.

This dissertation consists of three studies, with the following purposes: 1) assess the current foster care landscape related to the promotion of healthy eating and physical activity through questionnaire based and objective data; 2) examine legislature and training programs that focus on nutrition and physical activity as it relates to foster families; and 3) utilize the Delphi method to begin the development of a potential healthy eating and physical activity intervention for foster care through the recommendation of intervention strategies that could be integrated into the foster care system. These purposes are achieved utilizing a systems-based approach. More specifically, research was conducted through collaboration with several local agencies throughout Virginia. The findings from Study 1 suggest that obesity is prevalent among foster children and foster parents in Virginia and that there are some indications that the foster home environment is related to lifestyle behaviors and weight status, though the relationships were small. Study 2 identified face-to-face trainings targeting foster parents and children (depending on the child's age) as an important and practical method to intervene through regular trainings. Study 3 indicated that there are few federal or local policies that explicitly address physical activity, nutrition, and weight status. A number of recommendations are made for the structure, content, and process of integrating obesity prevention and treatment strategies within the foster care system.

Principal Investigator: N. Dickon Reppucci, PhD

Institutional Affiliation: University of Virginia, Department of Psychology

Study Title: Risky Relationships and Teen Dating Violence Among High-Risk Adolescents

Term of IRB Approval: March 11, 2010 –March 10, 2011 (approved in two annual continuations through 4/30/2013)

Study Completed: June 2013 (Preliminary results)

Summary or Abstract:

This study examined prevalence of teen dating abuse among at-risk adolescents. It also examined risk factors for (1) remaining in relationships after abuse has occurred, and (2) continued victimization and/or perpetration of violence as the youth moves between relationships, as well as protective factors associated with involvement in healthy romantic relationships. The study looked at relationship characteristics (e.g., unequal power dynamics, age differences) as it related to dating violence.

The final sample included 223 adolescents (ages 13-18 years), who ever ‘dated someone’ or been in a romantic relationship that lasted at least 1 month?”, and received community-based services (e.g., foster care, alternative schooling) and/or low-income services (e.g., free or reduced lunch, low-income housing). 58% were female. Participants were recruited through local agencies in the Central Virginia area, including departments of social services, departments of juvenile justice, and alternative schools.

Participants completed two waves of two-hour in-person interviews that were spaced a year apart. Participants chose the location of their interviews, most of which took place in participants’ homes. Of those who participated in wave 1, 95% also participated in wave 2. Written consent was obtained from parents and written assent from teens prior to study enrollment. Teens also received a \$50 gift card at each interview.

Preliminary findings:

- Rates of dating abuse were much higher in this at-risk sample than in previous surveys of population-based samples. For example, within teens’ earliest reported relationship, 41% of participants reported perpetrating at least one act of physical abuse, 83% reported perpetrating at least one act of emotional abuse, and 16% reported perpetrating at least one act of sexual abuse. Rates were similar for victimization. Boys and girls were similar in rates of victimization.
- This at-risk sample was also more sexually precocious and experienced than population-based samples. About 48% of boys and 43% of girls reported engaging in sexual intercourse with their first ever romantic partner, with 65% of youth reporting having had intercourse by age 14 or younger.

- The typical relationship was characterized by high levels of intimacy. The average length of a relationship was about 9 months, with most teens rating even their first relationship as “very serious” or “moderately serious.” Most relationships involved sexual intercourse. Over half of dating couples engaged in substance abuse and 3 of 4 couples engaged in delinquent behaviors.
- 70% of teens dated a partner who was at least one year older, and 14% dated someone who was at least four years older.
- Less than 60% of teens did not use “protection” during sex all of the time; 20% either contracted a sexually transmitted infection or they (or their partner) became pregnant during the relationship. Poor sexual health was associated with larger age gaps between partners. Teens dating older partners were also more likely to engage in delinquent behavior and/or substance abuse.
- Violence victimization and perpetration were intercorrelated. That is, teens were likely to have experienced both victimization and perpetration of violence across relationships, or none at all.
- A majority of participants reported involvement in more than one relationship that was either physically or emotionally abusive. Dating abuse *by* partners and *toward* partners were both relatively stable across teens’ earliest three relationships.
- Dynamic risk factors currently at play in a teen’s dating life, such as depression or peer delinquency, had much stronger associations to dating abuse than static risk factors, such as early sexual debut or childhood maltreatment.
- An active coping style was associated with positive relationship outcomes like negotiation, while an avoidant coping style was associated with less negotiation and greater dating abuse.